



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

March 16, 2006

News Release

ICE arrests 6 Puerto Ricans for alleged human smuggling

YAUCO, Puerto Rico – Six men who allegedly smuggled a group of Dominicans into the United States were arrested here yesterday by U.S. Immigration and Customs (ICE) special agents and officers of the Puerto Rico Police Department (PRPD).

United States citizens Enrique Arizmendi Vélez, 30; Jeffrey Duoct Soto, 35; Daniel Lebrón Torres, 27; Erhier Vargas Rosa, 29; José Pérez Quirsola, 29 and Manuel Vélez Avilés, 27 were charged with violations to United Status Code (USC), Title 8, Section 1324.

ICE agents received information that illegal aliens were being kept at a residence located in Almacigo Alto, a rural sector of Yauco, Puerto Rico. A surveillance of the residence, led to the arrests of the alleged smugglers and 10 Dominicans who had illegally entered the country.

“ICE continues its investigative efforts to dismantle alien smuggling organizations whose only goal is to profit at the expense of others,” said Lydia St. John-Mellado, acting special agent-in-charge of ICE in Puerto Rico. “Smugglers will be found, and will face the consequences to the fullest extent of the law.”

The U.S. Attorney for the District of Puerto Rico has accepted the case for prosecution and the ICE investigation into this smuggling ring is ongoing. The six alleged human smugglers have been transferred to the Metropolitan Detention Center in Guaynabo, Puerto Rico where they await the outcome of their case. The 10 Dominicans were charged for being illegally present in the country. They are in ICE’s detention center in Aguadilla, Puerto Rico.

Disrupting and dismantling human smuggling and trafficking rings has been a top priority for ICE since the agency was established in March 2003, given the potential threat that these organizations pose both to national security and public safety. With ICE’s broad authorities for enforcing immigration and customs laws and its expertise in financial investigations, the agency is able to pursue human smuggling organizations more aggressively than ever before. As a result, ICE agents arrested more than 1,630 human smugglers nationwide in Fiscal Year 2004.

The public is reminded that a criminal complaint contains only charges and is not evidence of guilt. The defendants are presumed innocent and are entitled to a fair trial and the government has the burden of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.